



MANUEL HASSASSIAN

Ambassador of Palestine to the United Kingdom

Mehmet Ali Birand, Editor-in-Chief and Chief Anchor for Kanal D

Thank you. I know that the Palestinian problem is much more important than Syria and Iran, but let us have Hassassian now. If you would like to add to those remarks, go ahead. If not, carry on with the Palestine problems and questions.

Manuel Hassassian, Ambassador of Palestine to the United Kingdom

Thank you very much. I think it is important, before we start talking about the specifics of the Middle East, to make some generalisations and basic definitions. I think today we are confronted with a Middle East that is being transformed politically from regimes that used to be secular into more Islamist. Let us not kid ourselves that when we talk about the Arab Spring, we have Arab revolutions. Actually, we do not have a revolution in the Arab world. If we talk about revolutions, then we have to define what a revolution is. Without major social transformation, I do not think we can talk about the Arab Spring as having a different political culture that could accommodate the politik real in the Middle East today. We know for a fact that most regimes that have been transformed from secular into something called Islamic regimes have been vacillating, I think, since the latter part of the 19th century. We talk about ideology and we talk about the issue of how to democratise and how to westernise without changing the present character of Islam. Between ideology and political transformation, we have a basic contradiction. I consider it to be an oxymoron in the process of development and modernisation.

What we are witnessing today in the Arab Middle East is not a process of democracy. It is a process of democratisation organically tied with a process of modernisation. That is why, when we look today at the recent developments in the Middle East, we have seen the [inaudible], Twitter, IT, and the Internet have played a significant and imperative role in changing the psyche and the political culture of the young generation, who we think are the ones that are going to make history. It is so unfortunate that since that latter part of the 19th century and Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, we have been oscillating between secularisation and Islamisation. My greatest disappointment in the Middle East today, which I consider to be a Muddle East, is the fact that the youth could not really concretise their political ideology into concrete actions, because they had been hijacked again by what we call the ossified Islamic ideology, which came into perspective today and is controlling the situation, because the objective conditions are still not right. Talking about the Middle East in general, I think the questions of transformation and ideology have been stuck in the process where, I think, there should be a new way of thinking, a third way of thinking that could accommodate both the Islamic and the secular. That, in itself, is not valid and is not available. Let us start with the Palestinian issue, after this big introduction.

I think when we talk about the Middle East, we are undermining the crux of the problem in the Middle East, which is the Palestinian Israeli conflict. The Palestinian Israeli conflict has been mismanaged. Here, I must directly comment on the US policy, which has not been an honest broker of peace, with due respect, Ambassador Djerejian. During your time, with the Bush administration, we have seen dramatic changes that we were not really ready for. We thought we were on the right process of conflict resolution. However, the ups and downs in this peace process made us feel that we are losing confidence in the United States as an honest broker of peace, because of this Catholic marriage and its unequivocal support to the state of Israel, which is tied, basically, to its domestic policies as much as it is a foreign policy issue. We cannot continue. For the 20 years we have embarked on this peace process with nothing coming into existence except the abortion of the two state solution, which the United States embraced, by which the United States convinced the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to give up armed struggle and to try, more or less, to seek peace through negotiations. Today, we are stuck between the historically inevitable and the politically impossible.

When we talk about the Middle East *per se*, Iran, Syria, etc., these are transient phenomenon because if we do not solve the Palestinian Israeli issue, I do not think we are sure to create a stable and a secure Middle East. A stable and



a secure Middle East requires extensive and strenuous efforts by a big power like the United States that can have political leverage with Israel. It is the only country that could really pose some political weight to make Israel change its attitude in the Middle East, which has been considered to be a pariah state, a state with a kleptomaniac Prime Minister like Netanyahu, who wants to be in history for the Israeli...

Mehmet Ali Birand, Editor-in-Chief and Chief Anchor for Kanal D

Do you agree with Jean-David?

Manuel Hassassian, Ambassador of Palestine to the United Kingdom

Yes, I agree with him. I agree with him. His formula might work. The reason I am saying this is the fact that we cannot keep on investing in the wrong horses. We cannot bet on the wrong horse. This regime in Israel today has portrayed significantly that it does not have a peace agenda. It has a war agenda. Recently, we have seen it in Gaza. We have seen the reaction to the Palestinians going to the United Nations General Assembly, to exercise Non Member State Observer status. We have been attacked by the building of more settlements, by trying to withhold tax revenue, and by the sanctions against the Israelis that are still piling up with this regime.

People sometimes misunderstand why we, the Palestinians, have resorted to the United Nations. Let me very briefly say that.

Mehmet Ali Birand, Editor-in-Chief and Chief Anchor for Kanal D

Then, let us get to the questions.

Manuel Hassassian, Ambassador of Palestine to the United Kingdom

Yes. Very briefly, I would say that we went to the United Nations because we want to salvage, Mr Ambassador, the two state solution. We went to the United Nations to show the world that the West Bank is not a disputed territory, it is an occupied territory. We went to the United Nations to show that we had made our historic compromise in 1988, when we accepted one fifth of our historic land, the borders of 1967. We went to the United Nations because we lost hope in the peace process and the great powers failed dismally in engaging us at the negotiation table. For all these reasons, we went to the United Nations. It is not, sir, a unilateral act. This is an act that pertains to the Palestinians' right to self determination. We must practice our inalienable rights, such as freedom; other free nations in the world had the chance to have their own states. Still, today, Israel is talking about provisional borders. That, in itself, is not acceptable, when we have embarked on a process of peaceful non resistance. This is the strategy that the Palestinian authority has developed over the last 20 years. What do we get in return? We get double the settlements, double the settlers. The idea of the Palestinian State is almost gone, because if you go to the West Bank today, you can see three cantons that are geographically discontinuous, with total separation from Gaza. The recent E1 envelope seal of Jerusalem that will totally cede it from the Southern part of Bethlehem and Ramada is in itself a non starter.

Mehmet Ali Birand, Editor-in-Chief and Chief Anchor for Kanal D

Do you agree with that?

Meir Sheetrit, Member of Parliament, former Minister of Internal Affairs, Israel

No, I do not agree. I do not think it is constructive.

Mehmet Ali Birand, Editor-in-Chief and Chief Anchor for Kanal D

Why are you doing this?

Honestly, nobody can understand doubling the settlements.

**Meir Sheetrit, Member of Parliament, former Minister of Internal Affairs, Israel**

I am coming to it. First, I do not think that to go to the United Nations was a constructive act, because even Netanyahu, who is considered a right wing party and is right wing, agrees and says a peaceful solution of two states for two people. This means that he agreed to establish a Palestinian state. He tried to negotiate. I am sorry to say that the Palestinians are now making preconditions, saying, 'We are not negotiating until you free settlements.' I am against enlarging settlements, but putting it as an obstacle to negotiation is a mistake, not now, but during the last three years. This is because, in any case, when we give any territory back, we uproot all the settlements from there. As such, what could happen if they have built 300 apartments over the last three years? I want to calm you down. These are, in my opinion, words of election. I do not believe that those apartments will be built. It took many years to build these in the past. Nothing happens. It is a unilateral action and I do not think it is constructive.

Finally, if I was in the shoes of Mr Barack Obama today, what I would do is call together all the leaders of the Arab states that signed the Arab Initiative, together with Israel, and tell them to sit down until you get white smoke and come to an agreement. I believe that if we in the same price, which we have to...

Mehmet Ali Birand, Editor-in-Chief and Chief Anchor for Kanal D

We came quite near in Camp David. It did not work.

Meir Sheetrit, Member of Parliament, former Minister of Internal Affairs, Israel

I am suggesting we enlarge it and make regional peace, not only with Palestinians, but will the Arab States. However, the Initiative says to Israel 'If you go back to the '67 borders and find an agreeable justified solution for Palestinian refugees, we, the Arab States, agree to make peace with Israel, full normalisation, and that will be the end of the conflict.' I think, why not pick it up, call all of them together, negotiate together, and find a solution to really establish a Palestinian state on this basis. Have a general peace.

Mehmet Ali Birand, Editor-in-Chief and Chief Anchor for Kanal D

Do you feel Israel is isolated?

Meir Sheetrit, Member of Parliament, former Minister of Internal Affairs, Israel

Yes, of course. I think, again, I am in a position, so it is not fair. I think the action of the government not making the process of peace, not pushing it ahead creates some kind of isolation. The world feels that the only way there is a full majority of the Arab States in all the different countries to support the Palestinian request. Even many of our friends from Europe support it or abstain, because they do not want to be in a conflict with regards dealings with the Arab States. However, it is a mistake for governments, because I think if our government are moving ahead a peace process, nobody would go to United Nations with that. I do not think it is a save. It is constructive. I still think that we need to build a trust between Israel and Palestine and Israel and the Arab States. Maybe, after what we call the Arab Spring, which I call the Arab Winter, then the Spring will come. There is a good chance to create a new trust between us and the Arab States.

Mehmet Ali Birand, Editor-in-Chief and Chief Anchor for Kanal D

You see that is what I am saying, that the Palestinian problem will take [inaudible]. Say your last words quickly, then I will get to Mona, who is waiting.

Manuel Hassassian, Ambassador of Palestine to the United Kingdom

I am not surprised to see Meir responding the way he is responding. I know that deep in himself, he knows that the question of settlements has always been an impediment to the peace process. He knows that very well. We are not talking about settlements, when there were 20,000 settlers with few settlements in the West Bank, where we could, you know, shut our eyes and say, 'Okay, we will wait for the final status and then we will talk about the land swap and what

have you.' Sir, today 750,000 settlers are living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. You are talking about almost 10% of the West Bank being ceded to Jerusalem, called Metropolitan Jerusalem. Today, the Israelis, in second track negotiations, are telling us, 'We agree with you. We need to have a solution and that solution will involve an independent Palestinian State. However, is this independent Palestinian state going to be an Indian reservation? What kind of a state are we talking about? Yes, Netanyahu talks about peace. What kind of peace? He is talking about peace without relinquishing territories. The point that we are discussing today is ending occupation, Meir. Once we end occupation we can open the avenues of talking about how that state is going to be shaped, *per se*, to the point where you will have a relationship with Israel as a democratic entity and what have you, through land swaps. We have introduced this concept during the Camp David accords, which shows the flexibility of the Palestinian people, to be pragmatic enough to choose between constraints. However, we had hope with regard to going to the United Nations; you know it and I know it. The facts on the ground did not change, because the 19 year old woman carrying the M16 at the checkpoints at Ramada, could tell President Mahmoud Abbas, 'Go back to Ramada, I am not going to give you access to Jerusalem.' We know that for a fact. However, the reasons why we went to the United Nations, you know it and I know it, is because we failed in the peace process and Israel should shoulder this responsibility for failing in the peace process after us trying more or less to give up portions of our country-

Meir Sheerit, Member of Parliament, former Minister of Internal Affairs, Israel

Manuel, how can you succeed, if you are not negotiating?

Manuel Hassassian, Ambassador of Palestine to the United Kingdom

Who is not negotiating? We have accepted that we will negotiate, but your Mr Netanyahu is the type of guy who is known to be the maestro of procrastination and did not really engage in any kind of negotiations. He came on an agenda with the extreme right-wing secular fascist group to build settlements. How can we sit and talk with Netanyahu, if his agenda is settlements. Why did we talk with Olmert? You tell me. We talked with Olmert; his agenda was not settlements.

[...]

Manuel Hassassian, Ambassador of Palestine to the United Kingdom

Let me make some few remarks.

First, I believe that the international community owes it to the Palestinian people to resolve their plight by recognizing a Palestinian state. For decades, the Palestinian people have been denied their natural and historical right to independence and freedom. The Israeli occupation has been one of the longest occupations in modern history. I agree with Ambassador Djerejian that Israel cannot claim to be a democratic state while it is occupying another country and violating international law on a daily basis. In response to Mr Meir Sheerit, the reason why we went to the United Nations is because we wanted to reaffirm that Israel has no valid claim to any parts of the territory it occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and that Israel's colonization of Palestinian land is illegal. Following our recognition as a non-member state we will become a state under occupation and the occupied territories will no longer be considered disputed territories as Israel claims. Implementing international law and the Geneva Conventions should be the name of the game.

Second, we went to salvage the two-state solution which has an international consensus. The Palestinians for decades have been the underdog succumbing to the over-dog; despite the processes and initiatives that we have been engaged in and the various United Nations resolutions in support of our rights nothing on the ground materialised. This is due to the failure of the United States to use its political teeth by pressuring Israel to accept the two-state solution while we have now a pragmatic and moderate President H.E. Mahmoud Abbas who is willing to go an extra mile and make peace with Israel. Even though I still have hope for the two-state solution, the reality and now I remove my diplomatic hat is the only option left for us and for the same exact reasons that Ambassador Djerejian has stated is a one-state solution. And this one-state solution has two interpretations; a Palestinian one which believes in a one man



one vote and an Israeli one that maintains the status quo plus; meaning that Israel wants to maintain the territories and give the Palestinians a certain kind of limited autonomy authorising us to deal with health, education, collect our garbage to list a few without any political independence by controlling our borders and sovereignty. This, sir is Israel's interpretation of a one state solution. In regards to Israel creating a Jewish democratic state; we have to understand that a Jewish democratic state would infringe on the rights of 1.5 million Palestinians who live inside Israel by ethnically cleansing them from the State of Israel proper and transferring them to the West Bank or Arab countries and it means that Israel is not willing to accommodate or negotiate the question of the refugees and their right of return.